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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the lack of a clear definition in the educational profession of such key terms as philosophies, goals, and objectives. Accordingly, a clear rationale and definition is proposed for each of these terms, along with examples illustrating their appropriate use. An educational philosophy is defined as a statement of motivating concepts and beliefs developed by the community, the school board, and the superintendent. A goal is a long-range statement of intent derived from the philosophy, whose purpose is to provide guidelines for action. They are classified hierarchically as district goals, school-level goals, and program goals, each reflecting the higher-level goals respectively. Mission statements, derived from goals, define specifically what is to be accomplished and are generally followed by task analysis. Finally, objectives are measurable statements that clarify what can be expected of students as a result of instruction and learning activities. Examples are given of performance objectives, program objectives, and process objectives. (TE)

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PHILOSOPHIES, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

FOR EDUCATION

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Introduction

School districts are like ships on a stormy sea. Some have maps, charts, RADAR, able navigators and gifted captains. They weather storms and sail with confidence. Others are destined to scrape their bottoms on unknown shoals. For school districts, maps, charts, instruments and captains are analogous to an agreed upon philosophy, clearly stated goals, well-defined objectives and leadership committed to the direction they provide. How can this condition be achieved?

A major problem - a problem which weakens the educational profession generally - is definitions. There appears to be little agreement among us about what a philosophy is, what goals are and how they differ from objectives. A cursory review of literature will confirm this problem. A review of philosophy and goal statements from both California and Idaho demonstrated the lack of agreement on definitions among school districts.[1]

A degree of presumption is required to tackle a definition problem. Who is right? Why would one definition take precedence over another? A rationale and examples are provided in this paper in an attempt to persuade the reader. Agreement about the goals of local schools are not expected at the national level, but should be within the realm of reason at the state level and surely should be in place in individual school districts. The processes for securing agreement within school districts require clear definitions.

The professions are characterized by an esoteric body of knowledge and nomenclature, sometimes referred to as jargon. It is important that professionals communicate effectively and succinctly with each other. For example, the practicing physician diagnoses, analyzes, and consults with associates, drawing on professional knowledge and using a professional vocabulary. Philosophically, physicians are guided by the oath of Hippocrates. Practicing attorneys are bound by the body of common law, the statutes, and the Constitution. Professional language is used to produce a set of interactions in which justice is expected, however tortuous and complex the road to Philadelphia may be.[2]

Professional educators are weakened by lack of agreement on an esoteric body of knowledge and a precise nomenclature. The esoteric knowledge is there. The problem is often a failure to define it clearly.

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Philosophies

Many practicing educators appear to be confused about the form and function of a philosophy and consequently use the terms "mission," "philosophy," "goal," and "objective" inappropriately and interchangeably.

A school district should adopt a philosophy which will more specifically guide the work of individual schools. With input from the community, the school board and the superintendent can communicate effectively with administrators, staff, faculty, community, and students what they believe about school and students. The philosophy statement presents a "system of motivating concepts or principles." For example,

> "The board believes that a curriculum based upon recognized reliable research in child growth and development and teaching practices will provide students with the best opportunity to reach their maximum potential in school and be able to continue the learning process throughout life. Because the board recognizes that the home is the most important factor in shaping the personality, health, and character of students, it totally supports a well-adjusted and stable home life. Along with the home, church, and other public and private institutions, the board shares the responsibility of helping students develop high standards of achievement and moral conduct. The board of trustees of this district believes the most important educational tasks assigned to the schools are those of maximum intellectual and character development of students. This would include enlargement of their interests in and ability to promote the principles and the ideals of good citizenship in our free republic. Therefore, this district will concentrate its resources on developing an educational program to discharge these most important responsibilities."[3]

A philosophy is a statement of beliefs. As noted above, the board of trustees in Pocatello, Idaho, has stated what it believes about education, who should be involved in the educational process, and what the school district should do to facilitate the process.

Goals

A goal is a long-range statement of intent. Goals flow from the statement of philosophy, i.e., what the board believes. Goals are not directly measurable and generally not achievable. They provide guidelines for action. Goals can be approached, but they represent the ideal situation and ideals are rarely achieved.

It is disconcerting to people to state that goals are unachievable. Why would we write goals that cannot be reached? Again, clarification of language is our intent. Goals provide long-range guidelines. They are stated in ideal terms that resist measurement. Mission statements and objectives, in contrast, are more temporal and distinctly measurable as will be seen when these terms are discussed.

These examples of school district goals illustrate the language used to portray long-range statements of intent.

1. "Each student will learn to read and compute at the maximum of his/her potential."[4]

2. Each student should understand and appreciate human achievements in the humanities, arts, and sciences.

3. The study of science will develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for students to understand the relationship between the human body and the environment.

4. Each student should acquire good health habits and an understanding of the conditions necessary for maintaining physical and emotional well-being.

5. "Each student should acquire the knowledge, habits and attitudes associated with responsible citizenship."[5]

Words such as "maximum," "understanding," "potential," and "ability," commonly used in goal statements, do not lend themselves to accurate measurement. School people could develop methods to indicate whether or not the goals were receiving any attention at all, but goals are not written to be measured. They are written to clarify the intent of schools.

Aims and Purposes

Other words used interchangeably and sometimes indiscriminately with goals are "aims" and "purposes." We advocate the use of the word "goal" for long-range statements of intent, simply to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding among board members, administrators, teachers, students, and the public.

Sources of Goals

What is the source of goals for education? Ideally, the public should be involved in developing school district goals. Several processes are available to help community groups focus on the somewhat limited list of goals a district should embrace. The goals package from Phi Delta Kappa is an excellent example. Based upon experience, it is reasonable to expect the number of school district goals to be in the order of eight to eighteen. Fewer than eight goals probably will result in somewhat unwieldy statements of multiple intent. More than eighteen goals probably means the writers have lost sight of school limits, have narrowed definitions to the objective level, or are confused about what a goal is.

Goals As Tools. A board of education that has adopted a list of goals has provided a valuable tool for administrators in the district. Goals can be developed on at least two other levels related directly to those at the district level.

The most obvious use of district goals is to stimulate the development of school-level goals. School goals reflect district goals. In many cases, they could well be identical. They influence program decisions, particularly if the board directs administrators to stress one or more goals in a particular year. A principal might also decide to emphasize a particular goal at a given time in his/her school.

Ideally, each school will have the district goals and its own goals prominently displayed; framed and hung on the wall next to the picture of the President is very appropriate.

The third level at which goals are important, (district goals and school goals were the first two) is at the program level. The goals for reading, mathematics, physical education, vocational education, science, and all the other disciplines included in the curriculum of the district should be defined. They are the basis for the more definitive measurable objectives that pin down knowledge, skills and attitudes which students are expected to learn or acquire.

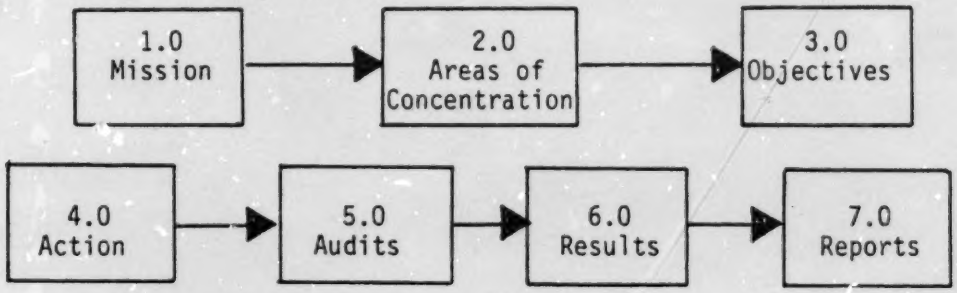
In language arts, program goals are generally accepted as being devoted to the improvement of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. These goals flow naturally from district goals such as numbers 1 and 2.

Program goals communicate the intent of a program. For example, educational goal number 3 above could be converted to a program goal simply by inserting the word "life" after "the study of". A district goal in physical education (number 4 above) could be adopted as it is at the program level. Goal 5 might also be adopted by the physical education teachers. In addition, they might generate a program goal like this:

"The body of each person is a marvelous, precious, and sacred entity. The major goal of physical education is to help students learn how to take care of their bodies for the rest of their lives."[6]

Mission Statements

In the inductive progression from the general to the specific, mission statements occupy a position between goals and objectives. Mission statements are typically used in management plans. They define what is to be accomplished and are generally followed by task analysis. A management plan which illustrates the position of the mission statement is shown by the diagram below.



In this diagram a mission (1.0) is a task or project to be completed. Areas of concentration (2.0) refer to the results of task analysis. In other words, they are the factors that make up the mission. If the mission was to implement a new reading program, the areas of concentration might include materials selection, budget concerns, inservice of teachers, community communications, monitoring implementation, evaluation, and reports.

Objectives (3.0) in a management plan are written for each area of concentration. They are measurable and provide self-direction for the responsible administrator or manager.

Action plans (4.0) are processes in which the administrator involves other people in carrying out the tasks of the mission. Audits (5.0) are the administrative devices used to monitor the various tasks assigned. Evaluation produces the results (6.0) and reports (7.0) that let involved people know what happened.[7]

Missions have a distinctly military connotation and probably originated with the McNamara era of accountability in the Defense Department. They have utility in school and business enterprises because of the inherent power in the accountability process. The steps in an accountability model as shown below clarify goals, mission statements, and objectives as parts of that model.

1. Goals: long-range statements of intent.

2. Needs assessment: activities that clarify what is and what ought to be with respect to a goal.

3. Problem Identification: a descrepancy between where we are and where we want to be.

4. Solution Alternatives: what is done to attack problem(s).

5. Select Solution: a decision to bring about change.

6. Implement Solution: a step that can become a mission statement.

7. Monitor Implementation: the manager must check to see if what s/he thought would happen actually does happen.

8. Evaluate: answers the question, did the solution work?

9. Report: results go to involved people.

10. Recycle: modifications may be necessary or a new solution alternative selected.

Objectives

Objectives are measurable statements that clarify what we expect students to be able to do as a result of instruction and learning activities. In this context, they function as parts of a learning strategy. The eight-step model from the work of Madeline Hunter is a classic example of a learning strategy.

1. Anticipatory Set: elicits attending behavior.

2. Objective: describes what the student is expected to be able to do as a result of instruction.

3. Purpose: explains why the lessons or activities are important to the learner.

4. Instructional Input: what the teacher does to cause learning to occur.

5. Modeling: examples, demonstrations and modeling behavior by the teacher.

6. Check for Understanding: can the student do what s/he is expected to do?

7. Guided Practice: intense, meaningful practice.

8. Independent Practice: opportunities for creativity and independent problem solving.

Performance Objectives

The word, "objective," is meant to convey measurable learning outcome. Variations in the comprehensiveness of objectives can be communicated using appropriate modifiers. For example, short-term objectives to be accomplished in a single lesson or series of lessons are called performance objectives. The older but sometimes controversial term "behavioral" has been replaced by the term "performance" in this discussion.

Objectives are characterized by identifiable sub-parts which contribute to their specificity. Generally, the parts are (1) identification of the behavior or performance expected from students; (2) a statement (implicit or explicit) of the conditions under which the students' performance will be measured or judged; and (3) the measurement criteria.

Other authors have used an "A-B-C-D" model to describe objectives. In this model "A" refers to the audience or actors, i.e., who is expected to perform. "B" refers to the expected behavior. "C" defines the conditions of performance, and "D" refers to the degree of attainment or the success criteria to be used.[9]

Specific expected behavior or performance desired is required when writing objectives. Thus objectives that employ phrases such as "the student will understand, know, or appreciate" are not acceptable because those words defy precise measurement. Words that identify measurable or observable behavior such as list, write, identify, spell, repeat, or solve are used to clarify learner outcomes because the actions of the student can then be observed, measured, or judged.

Performance objectives can be trivial. It is important to avoid that possibility by involving teachers and administrators in broad-based discussions of the purposes for writing objectives. Objectives are not trivial if they convey the intent of a learning strategy and clarify expected student performance.

It is also important to note that measuring objectives goes beyond standardized and criterion-referenced tests. Teachers are professionals. Professionals possess an esoteric body of knowledge. Because they are required to bring their best judgment to bear in the practice of their professions, teachers must often judge student performance. The judgment of professionals is a legitimate measure of student performance. Judgment should be more frequently acknowledged as a professional tool in education. In the process, educators would gain legitimacy and greater respect.

Program Objectives

Another more comprehensive level at which objectives are used is to clarify programs. Program objectives are used to define outcome measures in physical education, science, reading and other disciplines. Program objectives retain the characteristics of performance objectives except that measurable outcomes are projected for larger groups of students. The examples that follow illustrate the more comprehensive nature of program objectives. They are used when working with groups of teachers in program definition or in articulation from one level of schooling to another.

1. As judged by the instructor, the student is able to use scientific problem-solving when confronted with novel problems at appropriate levels of difficulty.

2. Each student in physical education will have a vigorous physical workout every day.

3. Every student will prepare a short expository speech using all five elements of the "Bull's-Eye Plan".

Process Objectives

Accountability is a process. It is a series of steps designed to define what is to be done and who is to do it, and to report results of the effort. Process objectives are often used in this context as a method for communicating effort and achievement. The process objective below illustrates the nature of such an effort. It is a dramatic way for a principal to communicate his/her efforts to a superintendent.

By June 19__, the English department will have:

1. Conducted a needs assessment for all students attending the school. At least five broad groups of students will have been identified and diagnosed.

2. Identified the major curriculum problems in the English department.

3. Developed alternative solutions for the problems identified.

4. Selected a solution strategy.

5. Proposed an implementation action plan.

6. Proposed an evaluation scheme based upon the problems identified.

Evaluation of this objective will take the form of a written document approved by the department teachers and the principal and presented to the superintendent or assistant superintendent.

Conclusion

In this paper, an effort to clarify the use of the terms, "philosophy", "goal", "purpose", "aim", "mission statement" and "objective", has been made. School administrators should become experts in the use of selected professional language. Why? The leadership which administrators are expected to provide requires them to be able to critique, correct and write the professional language. Improving the use of the language may contribute to improving schools by clarifying lines of communication. Schools improve when administrators help their administrative and teaching colleagues improve their performances.

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